

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SAIGON 03309 01 OF 02 220621Z

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 3309

EXDIS - MILITARY COMMANDS HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION SAIGON IMMEDIATE DAO SAIGON IMMEDIATE 21 MAR 75
REPEATED:

QUOTE

S E C R E T SACTION 1 OF 2 NHA TRANG 197

EXDIS - MILITARY COMMANDS HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

DAO FOR AOSOP/OR-IX/IS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT MILI VS

SUBJECT: UP-DATE AND ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL SITUATION IN PHU YEN PROVINCE

1. THE FOLLOWING REPORT PREPARED JOINTLY BY OUR PROVINCE REPRESENTATIVE IN PHU YEN, CHARLES BRADY, AND A MEMBER OF OUR DARLO TEAM, MICHAEL CHILTON, COVERS THE STATUS OF REFUGEES MOVING FROM HIGHLAND PROVINCES INTO COASTAL AREAS, THE GENERAL SECURITY SITUATION, POPULATION ATTITUDES, AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS WITHIN THE PROVINCE. IT COVERS THE PERIOD OF 17-21 MARCH 1975.

2. REFUGEE MOVEMENT FROM THE HIGHLANDS:

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PAGE 02 SAIGON 03309 01 OF 02 220621Z

PRESENT SITUATION: (A) MOVEMENT FROM PHU BON PROVINCE: NORTH OF HAU BON (C) FIGHTING IS REPORTED AND MOVEMENT THROUGH THE CITY HAS BEEN EFFECTIVELY STOPPED. HAU BON CAME UNDER HEAVY ATTACK BY FIRE THE AFTERNOON AND EVENING OF 18 MARCH. CASUALTIES WERE REPORTED TO BE HIGH THOUGH NO ACCURATE ASSESSMENTS ARE AVAILABLE. THE PHU BON PROVINCE CHIEF SUBSEQUENTLY WITHDREW FROM THE TOWN ACCOMPANIED BY A SMALL LOCAL FORCE ELEMENT AND IS BELIEVED TO BE WORKING HIS WAY TOWARDS THE COAST. ONE OF THE FIRST POINTS OF ENEMY INTERDICTION TOOK PLACE ABOUT THREE KMS SOUTH OF HAU BON AS MIXED MILITARY AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL PASSED THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN PASS. SEVERAL PIECES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT (ARTILLERY, TANKS, 3 - 4 TRUCKS WERE REPORTED DESTROYED) WERE LOST, CASUALTIES WERE HIGH AND ALL TRAFFIC WAS STOPPED. THIS MOUNTAIN PASS HAS BEEN THE PRINCIPLE BOTTLE NECK TO REFUGEE MOVEMENT OUT OF HAU BON. THE STATUS OF PHU TUC (D) IS UNCLEAR. THE DISTRICT TOWN HAS BEEN REPORTED TO BE THE SITE OF HEAVY CONTACT, IT HAS BEEN REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN ABANDONED, AND IT HAS ALSO BEEN STATED BY THE PHU YEN PROVINCE CHIEF THAT IT HAS FALLEN INTO ENEMY HANDS. ON AFTERNOON 19 MARCH TRAFFIC WAS OBSERVED TO BE MOVING SLOWLY IN THE AREA OF THE PHU BON-PHU YEN BORDER.

(B) MOVEMENT IN PHU YEN PROVINCE: FROM THE BOUNDARY OF PHU YEN PROVINCE TO CUNG SON DISTRICT NO KNOWN ENEMY INTERFERENCE HAS BEEN ENCOUNTERED. POOR ROAD CONDITIONS, RIVER CROSSINGS, AND STEEP BY-PASSES HAVE SLOWED MOVEMENT WITHIN THE PROVINCE. FROM CUNG SON DISTRICT TO QL-1 APPROXIMATELY 300 VEHICLES HAVE PROCEEDED ACROSS THE SONG BA RIVER AND HAVE PROCEEDED TO THE AREA OF DUC THANG VILLAGE ON THE AFTERNOON OF 20 MARCH WHERE THEY WERE STOPPED BECAUSE OF ENEMY LOCAL FORCE ROAD INTERDICTION BETWEEN THEM AND QL-1. IN ADDITION, APPROXIMATELY 2000 VEHICLES HAD REACHED CUNG SON ON THE EVENING OF 19 MARCH AND WERE AWAITING TEMPORARY BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION 8 KMS TO THE EAST BEFORE PROCEEDING ON THE FINAL SEGMENT OF THE TRIP.

(C) NUMBER OF VEHICLES AND REFUGEES: NO ACCURATE FIGURE OF VEHICLES MOVING IN THE COLUMNS ARE AVAILABLE, THOUGH ESTIMATES GIVEN BY MILITARY COMMANDERS ARE IN THE RANGE OF SIX THOUSAND. ESTIMATES OF PERSONNEL IN THE CONVOY, LIKEWISE, ARE CONFLICTING AT BEST. FIGURES USED BY REFUGEE PERSONNEL IN PHU YEN ARE BASED ON 100,000 PEOPLE. CONSIDERING NUMBERS OF ESTIMATED VEHICLES, THE NUMBER APPEARS TO BE REASONABLE.

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PAGE 03 SAIGON 03309 01 OF 02 220621Z

3. PROBLEMS: DESPITE HARDSHIPS ENDURED BY THE PEOPLE, SECURITY HAS BEEN THE OVERRIDING DIFFICULTY.

(A) SECURITY: ON THE PHU BON SIDE NUMEROUS PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED OR INJURED BY ENEMY AMBUSHES AND INDIRECT FIRE ATTACKS. ON THE PHU YEN SIDE ONLY INJURIES ENCOUNTERED HAVE BEEN DURING VC ATTACK ON FORWARD APC VEHICLES IN THE ROAD CLEARING OPERATION ON ROUTE TL-1 APPROXIMATELY 20 KMS EAST OF CUNG SON. ALTHOUGH

CASUALTIES ON THE PHU YEN SIDE HAVE BEEN LIGHT THUS FAR, IT IS ANTICIPATED THAT THE COMMUNIST LOCAL FORCES WILL OFFER STIFF RESISTANCE FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE TRIP ACROSS PHU YEN. AS OF THIS REPORT, TL-

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IS INTERDICTED IN FIVE LOCATIONS, VICINITY CQ0336MM TO CQ1540, BY THE D-96, K-13, AND D189 LOCAL FORCE BATTALIONS, WHICH HAVE JUST RE-DEPLOYED TO THE AREA DURING THE LAST FEW DAYS FROM THEIR TRADITIONAL A/OX FURTHER NORTH IN THE PROVINCE. OTHER SECURITY PROBLEMS ARE BEING ENCOUNTERED IN THE SOUTHERN PORTION OF THE PROVINCE WHERE THE D-9 LOCAL FORCE BN IS ATTEMPTING TO CUT QL-1 IN THE DEO CA PASS AREA, VIC CQ2427. IN ORDER TO OPEN ROUTES FOR PASSAGE OF REFUGEES, THE PROVINCE CHIEF HAD DEPLOYED FIVE RF BNS. FOUR RF BNS ALONG TL-1 AND ONE IN THE DEO CA PASS. WHILE GVN FORCES OUTNUMBER THE ENEMY ON TL-1 AND WILL PROBABLY BE ADEQUATE TO REOPEN AND SECURE THIS ROUTE, SECURITY PROBLEMS WILL REMAIN. IT IS ANTICIPATED THAT WITHDRAWING ENEMY UNITS FROM TL-1 AREA WILL SHIFT THEIR ACTIVITIES TO LOCATIONS ALONG QL-1 IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE PROVINCE IN AN ATTEMPT TO HALT REFUGEE MOVEMENT SOUTH OUT OF THE PROVINCE.

(B) NATURAL OBSTACLES: REFUGEE MOVEMENT ALONG 7B NORTH AND WEST OF CUNG SON, HAS BEEN BESET BY NUMEROUS OBSTACLES, PRIMARILY BY-PASSES AROUND BRIDGES AND FORDING OF RIVERS. AS DIFFICULT AND AS TIME-CONSUMING AS OBSTACLES HAVE BEEN, MOVEMENT HAS NOT BEEN STOPPED. THE MOST DIFFICULT NATURAL BARRIER HAS BEEN THE SONG BA RIVER CROSSING EAST OF CUNG SON. VEHICLES ARE PASSING THIS POINT IN AN AREA WHERE ARVN ENGINEERS ARE CONSTRUCTING A TEMPORARY BRIDGE. MILITARY VEHICLES ARE TAKING PRIORITY. ONLY ABOUT 300 VEHICLES HAVE PASSED UP TO THE PRESENT.

(C) RELIEF: ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS HAVE UNDERSTANDABLY BEEN APPARENT THROUGHOUT THE TRIP. THERE IS AN EXPRESSED SHORTAGE OF FOOD AND MEDICINE. KINDS AND AMOUNTS OF MEDICINE ARE BEING
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SECRET

PAGE 04 SAIGON 03309 01 OF 02 220621Z

DETERMINED SO THAT SUPPLY CAN BE ESTABLISHED. AS FOR FOOD, IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 50 T/DAY OF RICE WILL BE REQUIRED TO ADEQUATELY FEED THE ESTIMATED 100,000 PEOPLE. THE PROVINCIAL WELFARE SERVICE NOW HAS ON HAND 20,000,000\$VN FOR THE PURCHASE OF FOOD, AN AMOUNT SUFFICIENT TO FEED THE REFUGEES FOR 20 DAYS. NEITHER THE SUPPLY OF RICE NOR ITS TRANSPORTATION PRESENTS A SERIOUS PROBLEM. THE PROVINCE CHIEF HAS BEEN URGED BY HIGHER HEADQUARTERS TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT IN THE FORM OF 2000\$VN PER MILITARY FAMILY AS THEY PASS THROUGH THE PROVINCE. THE PROVINCE CHIEF IS RELUCTANT TO MAKE SUCH COMMITMENT ON THE BASIS OF VERBAL AUTHORIZATION ONLY, BECAUSE OF THE DIFFICULTIES OF CONTROL AND COLLECTING SUFFICIENT DOCUMENTATION TO ADEQUATELY ACCOUNT FOR THE FUNDS. IT IS NOT EXPECTED THAT ANY OF THE FLEEING REFUGEES WILL REMAIN IN PHU YEN, AS IT HAS ALREADY BEEN DETERMINED TO SETTLE THEM IN KHANH HOA PROVINCE, NINH THUAN PROVINCE, AND BINH THUAN PROVINCE. THE PROVINCE CHIEF, HOWEVER

HAS INDICATED THAT THOSE WHO WISE -- PRESUMABLY THOSE WITH RELATIVES IN PHU YEN -- WOULD BE ALLOWED TO RESETTLE IN THE PROVINCE. FOR THOSE RESUMING THE TRIP SOUTH, TRANSPORTATION WILL BE BY MEANS OF VEHICLES ALREADY USED DURING THE EXODUS. THIS NUMBER IS INADEQUATE, HOWEVER, AND THE PROVINCE CHIEF HAS REQUESTED ADDITIONAL TRANSPORTATION, THE APPROVAL OF WHICH HAS YET TO BE GAINED.

4. THE GENERAL SECURITY SITUATION IN PHU YEN PROVINCE:

THE THRUST OF COMMUNIST AND GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITY HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE EVACUATION OF CIVILIAN AND MILITARY PERSONNEL FROM THE HIGHLANDS. THE INTENSITY OF MILITARY ACTIVITY IN DISTRICTS OTHER THAN HIEU XUONG HAS REMAINED AT A LEVEL COMPARABLE TO THAT OF THE PREVIOUS SEVERAL WEEKS. IT IS NOTED THAT CIVILIANS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL HAVE BEEN EVACUATED FROM XUAN LANH VILLAGE, DONG XUAN DISTRICT, THE NORTHERN-MOST VILLAGE IN THE PROVINCE. THE DECISION TO WITHDRAW THE PEOPLE FROM THIS VILLAGE RESULTS FROM THE DISTRICT CHIEF'S DESIRE TO CONSOLIDATE THE SECURITY SITUATION RATHER THAN FROM NEW ENEMY PRESSURE.

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PAGE 01 SAIGON 03309 02 OF 02 220619Z

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3980

INFO USDEL JEC PARIS

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 3309

EXDIS - MILITARY COMMANDS HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 NHA TRANG 197

EXDIS - MILITARY COMMANDS HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

DAO FOR AOSOP/OR-IX/IS

5. THE POPULACE:

(A) ATTITUDES: THE PEOPLE IN BOTH THE POPULATED CENTERS AND THE COUNTRYSIDE HAVE VIEWED THE EVACUATION OF REFUGEES, THE RE-DEPLOYMENT OF FORCES, AND THE INCREASED MILITARY PRESENCE WITH GREAT ANXIETY. FEARS STEM NOT SO MUCH FROM WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS THE IMMEDIATE ENEMY THREAT, AS FROM THE UNCERTAINTY OF WHAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS DECIDED WITH RESPECT TO THE FATE OF PHU YEN. IN LIGHT OF THE PRECIPITANT WITHDRAWAL FROM HIGHLAND PROVINCES IT IS FEARED THAT PHU YEN MAY FOLLOW A SIMILAR COURSE. THIS PHENOMENON IS MANIFESTED BY EXODUS OF SIZEABLE PORTIONS OF THE ECONOMICALLY-PROMINENT ELEMENTS OF THE POPULATION. IT HAS BEEN DISAPPOINTING TO NOTE THAT SEVERAL PERSONS IN KEY POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP HAVE ARRANGED TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE PROVINCE ON THE PRETEXT OF OFFICIAL BUSINESS TO AVOID THE DANGER OF POSSIBLE MILITARY CONFLICT. THE ACTIONS OF THESE PEOPLE HAVE HAD CONSIDERABLE IMPACT ON THE GENERAL POPULATION, WHO HAVE LOOKED TO THEM FOR INDICATIONS OF HOW THEY THEMSELVES SHOULD REACT TO THE PRESENT SITUATION. ANOTHER INDICATOR

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PAGE 02 SAIGON 03309 02 OF 02 220619Z

OF THE FEELING OF UNCERTAINTY AMONG THE POPULATION IS THE INCREASED MOVEMENT OF FARMERS BACK INTO URBAN AREAS AT NIGHT. THE KEY QUESTION IN THE PEOPLE'S MINDS IS: WILL THE GOVERNMENT DEFEND PHU YEN OR WILL IT RELINQUISH THE PROVINCE WITH LITTLE OR NO EFFORT AS HAS HAPPENED IN OTHER AREAS? THE ENIGMA TRANSCENDS THE LOCAL POPULATION AND INCLUDES MILITARY AND CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP. ALTHOUGH IT IS NOW RUMORED THAT RANGER FORCES WILL REINFORCE LOCAL SECURITY UNITS, IT IS NOT KNOWN TO BE OFFICIAL. BECAUSE OF THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE FUTURE OF PHU YEN PROVINCE, DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMS HAVE UNDERSTANDABLY COME TO A HALT. THE GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE ITS INTENTIONS FOR PHU YEN LIKEWISE IMPACTS ADVERSELY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MORE SUBSTANTIAL SECURITY PLAN. THE PROVINCE CHIEF IS NOT CERTAIN WHAT HE WILL DEFEND OR WHAT FORCES HE WILL HAVE TO DO THE JOB WITH.

(B) ECONOMIC SITUATION: THERE HAS BEEN RADICAL FLUCTUATION OF THE PRICES ON STAPLE ITEMS SUCH AS RICE, EGGS, AND MEAT. IN ALL CASES PRICES HAVE BEEN ADJUSTED RAPIDLY TO MEET ANTICIPATED MARKETS. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN IT WAS LEARNED LARGE NUMBERS OF REFUGEES MIGHT BE SETTLED IN PHU YEN, THE PRICES OF ALL FOOD STUFFS ROSE SHARPLY. LATER, WHEN IT BECAME APPARENT REFUGEES WOULD BE SETTLED ELSEWHERE PRICES RETURNED TO NORMAL. NOW, WITH RUMORS OF POSSIBLE WITHDRAWAL OF POPULATION FROM PHU YEN, PRICES HAVE DROPPED TO UNPRECEDENTED LOWS, ON LIVESTOCK IN PARTICULAR AND NUMEROUS OTHER FOOD STUFFS IN GENERAL. NORMAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES HAVE ALSO BEEN AGGRAVATED BY CLOSURE OF ALL BANKS AND A RUN ON THE PROVINCIAL TREASURY SERVICE. THERE WERE INITIAL INDICATIONS THAT HOARDING MIGHT BECOME A PROBLEM. HOWEVER, WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT REFUGEES WOULD PROBABLY BE SETTLED ELSEWHERE AND WITH A POSSIBLE

LOSS OF SIZEABLE LOCAL POPULATION FROM THE PROVINCE, PRICES HAVE
RAPIDLY DROPPED TO NORMAL AND LOWER LEVELS.

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